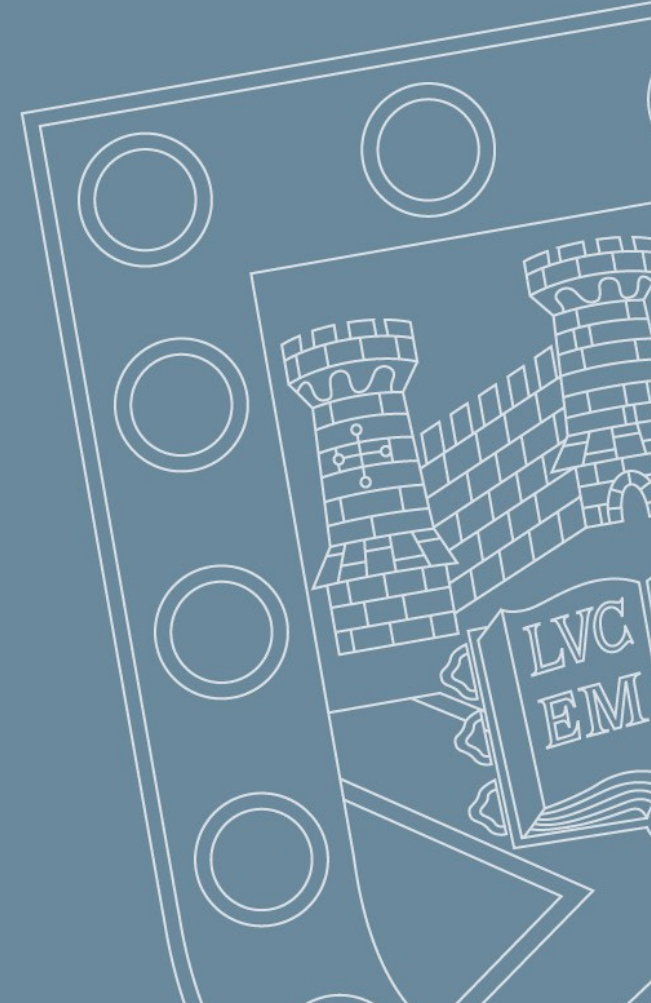
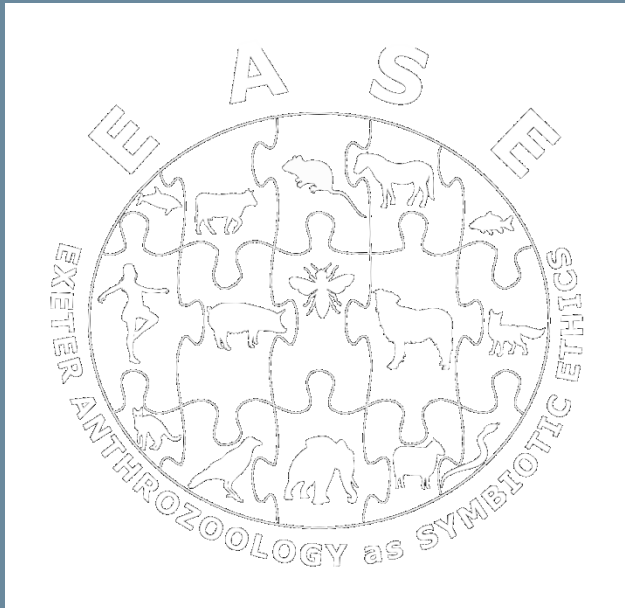


# Non-humans, technology and symbiotic ethics: the challenges of developing an ethical framework for an emerging research area

Steve North



# What does the term 'symbiotic ethics' mean to me?

- 'symbiotic' = close association and mutual benefit
- 'close association' – YES - recognises the dyadic nature of AZ interactions and that prioritising the human is problematic
- 'mutual benefit' – NO - I would not choose personally to emphasise the implication of 'mutual benefit' - may lead to 'full circle of life' romanticism of AZ interactions?
- Rather, I see our framing of 'symbiotic' as **recognising that two or more ethically significant organisms are in close association, with the interests of the human not *assumed* to be pre-eminent**



# Introduction

- Consider a relatively new research field, with a focus on the interactions between technology (primarily focusing on computers and all digital era technology) and non-human animals
- The researchers working in this field (including myself) describe their work as ‘animal-centred’ and are attempting to identify common ethical principles...



# Question 1



Q. Is it sufficient that our own studying of a process does not directly result in harm, if the eventual outcome of the process itself is harmful and potentially lethal for the other animal?

A. No. I would argue that the term 'animal-centred' (as considered fundamental to this new field) should exclude negative outcomes for animals (not just those outcomes directly caused by researchers, but also those caused by the studied context / process itself)



## Question 2



Q. When we embed ourselves in the world of other animals, can we partition our own involvement (for example, attempts to improve enrichment and welfare) and then walk away from the consequences of the practices under study?

A. No. I believe that researchers should grasp the perspectives of the non-human and appreciate that any research (or the contexts and processes within which such research is conducted) must ultimately improve the lives of the non-human subject. It is also difficult to defend the position that you can contribute to a non-human's welfare and then walk away from their greatest welfare issue of all: avoidance of being hurt or killed. They have evolved to avoid being murdered. Violations to their adaptations impact on their welfare. Therefore, being killed is a welfare issue and welfare considerations do not cease to apply just before their life is ended by a human.





# My guidelines for applying symbiotic ethics to studying interactions between technology and other animals



I would argue that researchers cannot claim to be truly 'animal-centred' in their thinking, unless they:

- (i) Recognise other animals as being **substantially**\* ethically significant
- (ii) Grasp the perspectives of the non-human
- (iii) Understand the full context of: the interaction between the non-human and the technology, the behaviours expressed by the non-human, the physical, political, cultural and social landscape and any other interactions occurring between other living agents in the studied environment (including humans).
- (iv) Appreciate that any research (or the contexts and processes within which such research is conducted) must ultimately improve the lives of the non-human subject.
- (v) Recognise that these steps are both a moral imperative and the only way to truly understand the subject of your research.



... and finally...

... by **SUBSTANTIALLY** (in my guidelines on the last slide) I mean that the ethical significance of the non-human is not just a passing consideration that may be overturned, at a whim, nor is it something that may be addressed during fieldwork through the tick-boxes of a 'research ethics' form. It is not just about protecting the researcher against 'consequences'... it must be a **SERIOUS, reflexive and fully-documented** attempt to view the non-human as having agency and a desire to exist, without pain, harm or fear.



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